On Repentance
A Pastoral Letter of
His Eminence Andrey Sheptytsky

Metropolitan of Galicia,
to the Faithful of His Eparchy

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To the Faithful of His Eparchies

Grace and Peace!

When, a month ago, I greeted you with my first pastoral letter, beloved brothers, I imagined myself early on a Sunday morning entering every home in which you live, in order to greet you in your own houses with the word of God and to invite you to the divine service in church. I began my letter in this way so as to show you, my brothers, that the word of God not only resounds in the church, but also comes into your homes, addresses every family and every Christian heart, and seeks to lead you at every moment of life to the church, to the house of God.

At that time we all went together to church—and in the same way, throughout our entire lives, we must all go together to the Lord God. I, your bishop, must guide you by the word of God throughout your whole life, and you, throughout your whole

life, must listen to me and follow me along the path by which I lead you to God.

Therefore, today as well, at the beginning of Great Lent, I once again come to you in your homes. In my place, this pastoral letter comes to you with the word of God, in order to greet you a second time and to tell you something of what I seek among you today. But today I do not come to all of you—I seek only some among you. Therefore, pay close attention, so that whoever among you is addressed by my words today may deeply feel and understand in his heart that this message is directed precisely to him.

Today I act as Jesus Christ commands every shepherd to act, and as He Himself acted. "The good shepherd," says Jesus Christ, "leaves ninety-nine sheep at home and goes to seek the one sheep that has gone astray."

Thus did Jesus Christ act when He descended from heaven into this world and became man, when for our salvation He left in heaven millions of holy angels and came to labor among men who had perished through sin, through which they had fallen away from God.

In the same way did Jesus Christ act when He walked among men throughout the world. Everywhere He looked for sinners,

like a shepherd searching for sheep that had gone astray. Thus He entered the house of Zacchaeus, the sinner.

And I too must act in this same manner. Today I come to you in that very work.

In my thoughts, through this letter of mine, I go through towns and villages; I enter every home—not only those that stand by the roadside, but also those that stand far away beneath the forest or high up on the mountain pastures. Wherever there lives or dwells even a single Christian soul, there I enter everywhere, and everywhere I look for that sheep which has been lost. Everywhere I seek that Christian soul which, through sin, has fallen away from the Lord God and has been lost to Jesus Christ.

I call out, I summon, I gently entreat, and I ask people: where has that poor Christian soul gone? Where does it live? Where does it remain? Where am I to find this Christian who is a sinner in the eyes of the Lord God?

Is he old, gray-haired, standing already at the threshold of the grave, and yet still carrying from his youth unforgiven sins? Or is he young—frivolous, amusing himself with life like a child with an apple—paying no attention to sin, forgetting God, caring nothing for eternal salvation?

Shall I find him among those who live in the countryside and labor on the land, or in the city or at the marketplace? Among the learned and educated, or among those who do not know letters? Among the rich, or among the poor?

I will not find this poor Christian soul unless it itself responds to my voice and itself understands in its heart that it is the soul which has been lost to Christ, and which Christ seeks through me. And so that the voice of conscience may speak within its heart, and so that each of you, my beloved brothers, may clearly understand whether he is among those sinners, I shall explain to you how a man falls away from God and how he may return to God.

WHAT BINDS A MAN TO GOD

When the Lord God sends a man into this world, He binds him to Himself as though with a golden thread, as though with a strong chain, which on one end is fastened to the Lord God Himself in heaven, and on the other end to the soul of the Christian. That golden thread, that holy bond which holds the Christian to God, consists in this: that God Most High accepts the man as His child, as His son. To the man, as to His son, He gives from heaven His holy grace and all His gifts. In return, God demands of the man that he observe His holy law in life and never do anything that would be contrary to the law of God.

This is given through holy Baptism. In it, precisely, is established between the Christian and the Lord God that holy bond of sonship which unites them.

Just as when a householder receives an orphan into his home as his own child and formally registers the child in court, and then says to that little one: "I shall be your father, and you shall be my child. Be obedient to me as a child, and I shall now give you everything that you need; and later you shall also become my heir, for after me you will receive my entire estate."

It is true that when a Christian thus receives an orphan as a child, there is established between the orphan and the adoptive father a bond similar to that which exists between a natural father and his natural child.

In the same way God speaks to men: "I receive you as My children; I shall be your Father, and you shall be My children. Obey Me as children obey their father, and never do anything that I forbid. If you are obedient to Me and faithfully observe My law, I shall grant you every good in life and shall bless you."

Through this, the holy thread is bound between God and men. It holds fast on God's side—for whatever God promises, He fulfills it—and it holds fast on the side of men when they do their part, that is, when they observe the law of God.

2. HOW THE BOND OF DIVINE SONSHIP IS BROKEN

But when a man does not observe the law of God, and in matters that are not entirely insignificant transgresses the commandments of God, that bond is broken.

Through every mortal sin, a man falls away from the Lord God and ceases to be an adopted child of God. For it is precisely in sin that a man transgresses the commandments of God. Sin

exists when a Christian, through his corrupt heart, refuses to do as God commands and does not obey the Lord God.

And once a man no longer obeys the Lord God and does not live as the Lord God requires of him, then the Lord God no longer regards him as an adopted son and no longer grants him those graces and that blessing which He promised to His faithful children.

Thus, between God and men, it is somewhat like when one man sells or leases something to another, or enters into some kind of contract with him. For example, a landowner sells land to his neighbor. One gives the land, and the other gives money; if someone does not wish to give the money, then he will not receive the land.

So it is, in a certain way, with the Lord God as well. The Lord God gives grace, and with grace eternal salvation of the soul; and man gives what he owes—that is, he observes the commandments of God. If the Christian does not wish to give his part, then God withdraws His.

Between God and men there is, as it were, a contract similar to those which men make among themselves, but with this difference: that in this divine contract the matter at stake is very great, namely the eternal salvation of the soul, whereas in

human contracts the matters involved are empty and small. There is also this further difference: in human contracts, what a Christian gives is sometimes worth less, sometimes more, than what he receives; but in the contract with the Lord God, the Christian gives very little and receives very much.

To live according to the law of God is no great thing, especially since God Himself gives assistance. God could demand this entire work of obedience from men without any reward at all, for man is God's creation and belongs wholly to the Lord God. If God were to demand this, man would be obliged to perform the most arduous labor without any compensation. Therefore, all human labor done for God is small and already owed by justice, even without any contract.

But what God gives and promises in this contract is exceedingly great, and man has no claim to it by any right. There can be no greater gift for a man than that God Most High, the Lord of heaven and earth, should adopt him as His child. And greater still is this: that after the Christian's death, God desires to welcome him into His heavenly Kingdom as His child. Moreover, every grace which God gives in this contract is of such value that it cannot be compared with any other good.

If we were to measure and weigh the grace of God according to strict justice, even the smallest grace, we would be convinced that it is so great that Jesus Christ Himself had to purchase it for us with His blood. That is to say, every grace is worth the blood of Jesus Christ. That most holy Blood was the price by which the Lord God restored His grace to mankind.

From this it is clear how great is the folly of that Christian who does not wish to observe the commandments of God and thus tears apart the holy bond of divine sonship which bound him to God.

3. WHAT SIN BRINGS IN PLACE OF LOVE

And when through sin that holy bond is broken, then man becomes to God—and God to man—as it were a stranger, and more than that, even an enemy. Man turns away from God. He ceases to be a child of God and becomes instead a slave of sin. Man cannot belong to himself in any way—for being created by the hand of God from the beginning, he lives in the world in order to serve the Lord God and to keep the law of God; and when he does not wish to do this, he delivers himself into the cruel bondage of Satan. When he sins, he fulfills the will and commands of the accursed devil and serves him.

He then no longer receives any reward from the Lord God for his service. He loses every right to the Kingdom of Heaven. Instead, he receives his reward from the one whom he serves—from the devil. Through sin, he exchanges the sweet, great, and radiant reward of the children of God for the bitter bondage of the devil, for which eternal destruction in hell follows.

And God, for His part, turns away from the Christian. He ceases to bless him in life. He ceases to listen to his prayers. And in place of the eternal happiness which He promised to His children, He assigns hell to the Christian. This is the same recompense that He gave to the angels when they fell away from Him and rebelled against Him.

God Most High is gracious and good toward His sons, but wrathful toward sinners.

If you reflect carefully on this, you will clearly understand that it would be difficult to find such an unreasonable Christian who, of his own free will, would choose the bondage of sin instead of the bright sonship of God.

And I think, my dear brothers, that none of you would ever take up sin, if only you fully knew and remembered what follows upon sin. The trouble lies in this: that Christians often do not

know this. In this matter many are, as it were, blind. Moreover, many Christians do not even know what constitutes sin.

4. HOW TO RECOGNIZE SIN

At times people say that it is impossible to act without sin, that everywhere and in everything there must be sin. Such talk is empty, for sin is in life something so great and so terrible that it is easier to recognize sin from afar than a rabid dog. One need only know the two things about which I shall now write. These are: the voice of conscience and the law of God. By these two things sin is very easily recognized. Therefore, whenever in any matter one of you finds these two signs, let him know that behind such an act—like some infernal tail—follow all those dreadful consequences of which I have just written to you.

5. THE FIRST SIGN OF SIN: THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE

The first thing by which sin may be recognized is the voice of conscience. In the very heart, in the soul itself, the Lord God has given man a divine teacher who tells the Christian beforehand what is sin and what is not sin.

When a Christian wishes to take up some sin—whether drunkenness, theft, fighting and quarrelling, cursing, or some form of superstition—this divine voice of conscience speaks within his heart and quietly says inwardly: "This is sin! This must not be done."

On the one hand, the secret and corrupt heart of man draws him toward sin, sometimes together with a diabolical temptation or the influence of an evil person. All this presents sin as something good and pleasant.

At times the intellect becomes so distorted in the Christian that he truly thinks this way and even delights in the very sin, as though it were something exceedingly good.

But on the other hand, the voice of conscience speaks within the heart and warns that this is sin, and that punishment follows upon sin.

The Christian stands inwardly between these two voices, and by his reason and will chooses what he desires; yet he already knows well what is sin. If he does not obey the divine voice—his conscience—then he certainly commits sin, and punishment is rightly due to him for that sin.

6. THE SECOND SIGN OF SIN: THE LAW OF GOD

This voice of conscience, however, can at times be mistaken. When a Christian follows it rightly, he will not be mistaken. Whoever acts according to what his heart tells him does not sin—but the heart can easily err if the Christian does not know well the law of God. The law of God is the second means by which sin can be recognized.

When the intellect sees that some action is contrary to the law of God, this is already a sure sign that such an action is sin. Therefore, the Christian must know the entire law of God well, in order to discern what is sin and what is not.

It happens among people that they call many foolish and empty things sinful, saying: "This must not be done, for it is a sin." For example: that one must not light a fire on Sunday, or cook food; that one must not salt food on Friday; that one must not take out rubbish after sunset; and similar things.

If a Christian does not know that none of these things are found in the law of God, and nevertheless acts against the voice of conscience, he will have sin on account of this—not because such things are in themselves forbidden (for that is empty talk), but because he did not obey the voice of conscience. He reasoned to himself that it would be sin, and yet he did it.

The Christian who knows the law of God well knows that the law of God does not speak of such empty matters, and therefore knows that there is no sin in them.

When, in any action, conscience tells the Christian that it is sin, he must obey that voice of conscience; and in addition, he must know the law of God well, so that by that law he may reason correctly—whether something is sin, whether it is contrary to the law of God or not. This is not a difficult task, for the law of God is short and clear: the Ten Commandments of God, and that is all. Everything else in the teaching of God concerning the obligations of a Christian merely explains and interprets those commandments.

Since every sin is thus designated—both by a man's own conscience and by the law of God—as a dreadful thing that brings death to the soul of the Christian, it is not difficult to guard oneself against sin in life. The entire teaching of God and the whole faith of Jesus Christ have this single purpose: to guard the Christian against sin and to rescue him when he has fallen into sin.

7. WHO HAS FALLEN AWAY FROM GOD

Now, my dear brothers, it is already clear to you whom I seek with this letter, and each of you can recognize for himself whether he is among those who have fallen away from the Lord God and have exposed themselves to His dreadful wrath, or not.

Those who have fallen away from the Lord God most grievously, and who have most severely torn the bond that united them with Him, are those who, through grave sin against faith, have fallen away from the Christian faith.

8. THROUGH SIN AGAINST FAITH

In the teaching of Jesus Christ, God has given us men His holy revelation from heaven. Through His Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, whom He sent to us for our salvation, He has instructed us in all the things that are necessary for us to attain, after death, the Lord God in heaven.

We men have, before the Lord God, a holy obligation to accept the teaching of Jesus Christ as true. Whoever does not accept as true everything that Jesus Christ has said would gravely offend the Lord God and Jesus Christ Himself. For whatever Jesus Christ said must be true. If someone were to think that it is not

true, he would be acting as though he were attributing falsehood and deception to Jesus Christ.

And this would already be an offense even against a mere man. If an honest man among you were to say something, and one of you were to reply to him, "That is not true," he would surely be offended by such words. How much greater, then, is the offense to say or even to think that Jesus Christ Himself spoke falsehood. If He spoke falsehood, then He is no longer holy, no longer the Son of God—but merely a simple man who deceived others by presenting Himself as God. And if He is not God, then the entire salvation He brought us is empty, and the grace of God which He purchased for us with His blood is empty as well.

See how many acts of godlessness are contained in one such empty statement—or even in one foolish thought that a Christian allows into his heart. "Perhaps there is no hell"—a short phrase, yet a dreadful sin, because through this phrase faith in the teaching of Jesus Christ is rejected. Jesus Christ said many times that hell exists; whoever thinks that perhaps this is not so acts as though he were saying that Jesus Christ may have taught falsehood.

If among you there should be found an unfortunate Christian who has sinned against the holy faith by such words or thoughts, let him know that he is the first among those sinners who have fallen away and whom God now calls to repentance.

9. THROUGH SACRILEGIOUS CONFESSION

Furthermore, among you there may be found sinners who for a long time have carried on their souls some unexpiated sin. There may be a man whose life is already nearly at its end in the sight of God, and who has never once in his lifetime made a sincere confession. Perhaps in his youth, as a boy in the pasture, or in idle amusement, or through an indecent song, he offended God. Since then he may have confessed several or even many times. But what use are all those confessions, if perhaps not a single one of them absolved his sin?

If he did not sincerely confess that sin from his youth at his first confession—because he was ashamed or afraid of the confessor—then perhaps all the confessions of his entire life not only failed to forgive that sin, but each of them added a new and dreadful sin to his soul. For consider this: if at the first confession he concealed a sin, he committed a grave offense. This is the terrible sin of sacrilege—confessing insincerely. At

the second confession he would have had to confess that sin of false confession, the sin he concealed, and in addition all the other sins that he confessed in that unworthy confession. None of those sins were forgiven, because such a confession is invalid; before the Lord God it counts only as sin and in no way can grant the grace of God or forgiveness of sins.

If at the second confession he again failed to confess all of this, then that confession too, before God, was sacrilegious and did not forgive sin. Through such a confession the Christian acquired yet another sin. And so again at the third, and again at the fourth. Thus, in succession, at every confession, the Christian adds to all his previous sins yet another sin of sacrilegious and insincere confession. This continues until he sincerely confesses everything that he has concealed, together with all those confessions, and up to the present moment, together with every Communion he has received, and together with all the sins that he confessed in those unworthy confessions.

What a dreadful burden of sins accumulates on the soul of a Christian because of that shame which prevents him from confessing sincerely.

Therefore, above all, if there is such a sinner among you, I address myself to him in a special way and earnestly beg and implore him to correct at least this year his old and unworthy confessions. Let him not fear that the confessor will scold or shame him—for every priest in confession stands in the place of the Most Merciful God, who awaits the conversion of the sinner and is always ready to forgive his sins, as soon as the sinner turns to Him in sincere confession.

Let him recall the dreadful punishment of God—the terrible fire of hell—which is due to him for such sins. Let him also recall dark death, which draws nearer with every day and may come precisely at a moment when he is least prepared and least thinking of it. It may come very soon. It may, my dear brother, overtake you unexpectedly and place you before the judgment of God before your repentance.

What will you answer the Lord God when He demands an account of your entire life? How will you respond when He reproaches you for having squandered His greatest graces and gifts? While there is still time—listen to the voice of God who calls you to repentance and amendment—return to God with your whole heart and correct your life.

10. THROUGH NEGLECT OF THE DIVINE SERVICE ON SUNDAYS AND FEAST DAYS

There may be found among you not a few who do not consider it a sin to omit the Divine Service on Sundays or feast days, although the Lord God repeatedly commanded in His law that the holy day be sanctified, and the Church, interpreting the law of God, commands Christians to be present at the Divine Service on Sundays and feast days and to listen devoutly to spiritual instruction.

To omit such a Divine Service is to neglect a grave duty toward the Lord God.

If a Christian is unable to go to church because he lacks strength, or is ill, or has nothing suitable to wear, then it suffices for him to pray at home. God never demands of a man what he cannot do. But if a Christian is healthy and able to go to church, yet does not go out of negligence or laziness, then by that single neglect of his duty he commits a grave sin and loses the grace of God.

Nor is it surprising that the Lord God demands such strict fulfillment of duties from men. God is a greater Lord of heaven and earth than all the kings and emperors of the whole world. And you yourselves know best how strict and severe imperial

service is in the army, or the obedience demanded by every other authority in the world. Indeed, a Christian would fare badly who wished to flee imperial service or failed to appear in court when summoned. If imperial service is so important, how much more important is the Divine Service, to which God has commanded all Christians to present themselves early on Sundays and feast days.

And you also—who do go to church on Sundays and feast days, but instead of praying to God with a sincere heart speak with others outside the church, or even talk within the church and amuse yourselves with all manner of empty thoughts—count this as sin. The Lord God calls Christians to church not in order that they may converse or look about, but in order that they may hear the entire service. When the priest celebrates the Divine Service in church, all the people present must, together with him, offer sacrifice to the Lord God Most High.

A sacrifice is owed to the Lord God by all people, as a kind of tribute or offering, as a sign that a man acknowledges the Lord God and desires to serve Him faithfully. In ancient times, under the Old Law, people offered sacrifices from their possessions and from the fruits of the earth, in order thereby to give honor to the Lord God, to thank Him for all graces, to beg His forgiveness for sins, and to ask Him for all necessary graces and

gifts. All those sacrifices—for example, offerings of grain, produce, or a calf or a sheep—were too small for the Lord God and unworthy of so great a Lord.

Only Jesus Christ offered to the Lord God a sacrifice from His own life, when He voluntarily accepted death. That sacrifice was so perfect that it rendered true honor to the Lord God and obtained the grace of God for all mankind.

Jesus Christ also wished to leave us a way to give glory to God. He left us a sacrifice—the sacrifice which we call the Divine Service—which consists in this: that the sacrifice of Christ's death is renewed on our altars each time the priest celebrates the Divine Service at the altar and, by the holy words of Christ, consecrates the holy gifts—bread and wine—into the most holy Body and the most holy Blood of Jesus Christ. When the priest does this, all Christians present must pray together with him to the Lord God and stand in church with such devotion as though they were on Mount Golgotha itself, at the moment when Jesus Christ was dying on the Cross for us.

11. THROUGH HEAVY LABOR ON SUNDAYS

Count it also as sin, my dear brothers, when any one of you performs heavy labor on Sundays or feast days, for the holy day must be wholly dedicated to the Lord God and must not be turned into a day of work.

12. THROUGH THE SIN OF HATRED AND DISCORD

Christians also fall away from the Lord God through sin when they live in hatred, discord, and curses toward others, and commit injustices against them—whether by bodily harm, by fraud and theft of property, or by slander and defamation of reputation. Whoever grievously wrongs his neighbor in any manner thereby grievously offends the Lord God, for he wrongs one whom God loves as His child and for whom Jesus Christ shed His blood.

Jesus Christ counts everything that one does to one's neighbor, whether good or evil, as though it were done to Him Himself.

13. THROUGH SINS OF IMPURITY

In an even more grievous way does a man sever the holy bond that unites him with God—namely through all sins that are contrary to the Sixth Commandment of God.

In this sin, every matter, even one that may appear small, is a grave sin. Not only deeds, but every indecent word, every impure glance, every song, and even every impure thought that a Christian admits into his heart. Therefore, with regard to this sin above all, the Christian must say everything in holy confession exactly as it occurred and conceal nothing in his heart.

An even greater sin is committed when one sins after marriage, for in such a sin not only is the Sixth Commandment of God transgressed, but an oath is also broken. And since both parties have sworn an oath, two oaths are broken at once.

A still graver sin is committed with close relatives. And there are also sins so dreadful and so great that one is not even permitted to speak of them.

14. RESERVED SINS

You yourselves know, my dear brothers, that there are also sins for which not every priest is able to give absolution. A man who has committed such a sin would need, for example, to come to Lviv to me for holy confession, or to write to me so that I might grant a certain priest the authority to absolve him.

Such has long been the custom in the entire holy Church: that the bishop reserves to himself the most serious sins—not in order to punish people, but in order to deter them from these sins; for only a foolish or godless person would take upon himself a sin which he knows cannot easily receive absolution.

Among the sins of impurity, there are as many as three kinds so grave that in our eparchy they are reserved to the bishop.

Therefore, regarding the Sixth Commandment, the Christian must confess everything that he remembers.

Just as the sin was in the heart, so must it be on the lips in confession.

One thing must not be said: the name of the person with whom one sinned, for that does not belong to the sin.

15. THROUGH DRUNKENNESS

Yet in another way can a Christian fall away from God and become a slave of the devil—namely through drunkenness. By this means the greatest number of people fall away from the Lord God so far that it is often already difficult to bring them back. It requires the grace of God—a miracle—to restore such a sinner to God.

After drunkenness follow many other sins: gluttony, sloth, fighting, theft, quarrelling, and every kind of impurity. From these sins it is difficult to rise again, because drunkenness deprives the Christian of reason.

Each of you knows this well from observing a drunkard: even a sensible Christian, once intoxicated, becomes more foolish than a child, and at times even more senseless than a beast.

How then could this not be a dreadful sin before the Lord God? How could it not draw down a severe punishment upon a Christian, to so drown reason, soul, and conscience?

It suffices to become drunk even once for a man already to be a drunkard before the Lord God, even if people might still regard such a person as sober.

16. THROUGH SWEARING AND CURSING

People curse and swear, and at times they themselves do not understand what a dreadful thing a curse is. Whoever curses acts as though he were wishing evil—death, illness, misfortune, or something similar. It is not fitting to wish evil even upon one's most bitter enemy, and this is a grave sin.

Consider, my dear brothers, how great a sin it is when a Christian curses not an enemy, but his own wife or children. There are even mothers who do not fear or feel shame to curse their own child. If this is done out of ignorance and thoughtlessness, it may be that the Lord God does not reckon it as a grave sin; but whoever already knows what it means to curse must never do this.

The same may be said of swearing. This too is a sin, once a Christian knows what he is doing. To swear is to take the Lord God as a witness. When a serious matter is at stake before a court of law, it is not a sin to swear truthfully and justly. But for a trivial or empty matter—even if one swears to the truth—it is still improper to invoke God as a witness. And how much worse it is when a Christian swears falsely, or even merely swears lightly. In such a case there are two sins: one for the lie, and another for the act of swearing.

If I wished, my dear brothers, to search everywhere among you for those who through mortal sins have lost the grace of the Lord God, I would still have to search for a long time and speak at length about all the ways by which a Christian can offend the Lord God. But I already believe that each of you who reads this letter of mine, or who has listened as another read it, has already looked into his own heart and found there those sins by which he has offended God. And when the voice of conscience thus speaks in the heart, and each of you has acknowledged before the Lord God that he is a sinner, then it is already as though Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, had found the sheep that was lost to Him.

Together with the voice of conscience, and with this word of God that I write to you, the grace of God has also spoken within the heart of each one of you—a grace which calls you and invites you to sincere repentance.

The time of Great Lent, my dear brothers, is a time of repentance. Holy Church prescribes that during this time all Christians—not only sinners, but even the righteous, for they too have something before God for which to repent—should go to confession, and there be freed from all sins, and return to the grace of God and to the Lord God.

And since all of you will soon be going to confession, I write this letter to you in order to help you in this matter, and so that there may not be found among you even a single person who would confess badly. Therefore, I call you all with the words of Jesus Christ: "Repent."

You have all sinned. Some with greater sins, others with lesser ones, but perhaps there is not a single person among you who does not bear some sin. You have sinned, and through this you have drawn upon yourselves the displeasure and wrath of God. There may be some among you to whom only a light punishment is due, but there may also be some who have earned for themselves the eternal fire of hell. God, being angered, has turned away from you and has withdrawn His blessing from you.

A dark cloud of the wrath of God has settled over more than one of you—over more than one household, over more than one family, perhaps over more than one village. This cloud, full of thunder and lightning, does not allow the warm rays of the sun—the grace of God—to enlighten you and to warm your restless hearts; and life is sorrowful, for how can one truly rejoice, how can one not weep bitterly, when he feels the dreadful wrath of God over himself and may think that beneath

his feet the abyss of punishment stands open, ready to swallow him.

When I was once in the mountains, in a certain place by the Cheremosh River, I saw houses that stood on ground which was itself sliding away. As the ground shifted, parts of the house collapsed. Tell me, do you think it is possible to live peacefully and dwell securely in such a house that is collapsing, on such ground that is slipping toward an abyss? Truly, no one could live like that; one would always fear death. And how can a Christian live peacefully—still less rejoice and be glad—when above his head the house is collapsing, because such a house is unstable, not resting upon the blessing and grace of God?

How can one live peacefully who does not know whether the ground beneath his feet will suddenly give way? The whole world, after all, stands in the hand of God; and if God, in His anger, were wholly to withdraw from a Christian, it would go even worse for that man than if the ground beneath his feet were to collapse.

Thus you too are restless when you recall the punishment of God that awaits you; hearts must tighten with fear, conscience gnaws, and the Christian looks ahead uneasily, for he does not know whether God, being angered, will easily forgive sins and

restore His grace. Sins, my dear brothers, are like a terrible disease that corrupts the blood and threatens life as long as it is not completely driven out of the body by medicine.

There are also diseases that are not easily recognized from the outside. It is said that when a rabid dog bites a man, the wound may sometimes heal and the man may appear entirely healthy. But the poison remains in the blood. At times, even after nine years, it comes to the surface, and the man becomes mad like a dog.

Every sin is like such a bite from a rabid dog, through which poison enters the blood. Often, after committing a sin, a Christian does not even think about what he has done—and at times he even takes pleasure in it. Yet from that sin there passes into his blood, into his soul, a dreadful poison which at first he does not even recognize. Only after years does it reveal itself through the withdrawal of God's blessing and through divine punishment.

So that you may understand even better how terrible a poison mortal sin is, I shall tell you what entered among men through sin when sin first appeared in the world.

When God created man and sent him into the world, He gave him every good that he could desire: He placed him in the

paradise of delight, and in order to test whether man would be faithful and obedient, He commanded him not to eat the fruit of one tree. The matter seemed small—for to eat or not to eat an apple from a certain tree seems a trivial thing—but it is not a trivial matter to obey or not to obey the Lord God. That is something very important and very great. To disobey the Lord God is something exceedingly dangerous and dreadful.

The first man, Adam, forgot this—he allowed himself to be tempted and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree.

After this sin, God punished him in such a way that he himself died, and all his children through him lost that gift which Adam had, by the grace of God, for himself and for all his descendants—the gift that they should not die. Through sin, death entered among men, and together with death came all illnesses, misery, poverty, and all sufferings and misfortunes that exist among us. All this, like poison, entered into our blood. Thousands of years have passed, yet the poison of the first sin passes from generation to generation and brings death, sickness, and all kinds of misfortune to all men.

This poison of sin not only corrupts our blood and brings death to the body, but also passes into the soul and makes every man a child of the wrath of God. Adam not only lost his own grace

through sin, but also lost our grace, because from him the grace of God was to pass on to all of us, just as an inheritance passes from a father to his children.

That corrupted blood which we have from him damages our souls, so that we are born more foolish and worse. Our intellect is darkened and easily errs, and our will is weak and has a certain evil inclination toward every sin.

You see how much evil one single sin brings with it.

Now then, my dear brothers, look into your hearts, and in those hearts seek out the sins by which you have offended God. Ask yourselves what punishment is due to you for your life. And if you find, my dear brother, in your heart sins that have not yet been atoned for, then fear the punishment of God, fear eternal death, and do whatever you can to rid yourself of sin and to restore the health of your soul.

Give thanks to the Lord God that He did not allow you to die in those sins, and that He has found for you a remedy which can cleanse your soul and restore to you everything that you lost through sin.

Jesus Christ came down from heaven into this world in order to rescue and save sinners, and He brought from heaven a holy medicine for that dreadful disease of the soul—sin.

He came for you as well, and for you He has this holy remedy.

That holy remedy is the holy Mystery of repentance—holy Confession.

In Confession, through sincere sorrow for your sins, through accusing yourself of them, and through the absolution which the priest gives you, you can return to the grace of God and once again bind that holy bond which is meant to unite you with God, as a child with his father.

Today, my dear brother, I wish to lead you myself to holy confession and to instruct you how you must confess, so that your confession may be good and so that the spiritual father may not have great difficulty with you in confession.

Know this well and remember it throughout your whole life: that you yourself, by your reason and by your heart, must prepare well before confession. Otherwise, if you approach unprepared, the priest in confession will be forced to struggle with you for a long time, and even then your confession may be invalid.

In order for the spiritual father to give you absolution, he must be certain that your confession is good; he must know well whether your previous confessions were valid. Before absolution, the spiritual father must know each sin individually and the full account of each sin. Likewise, you yourself must be certain that you have true contrition for your sins.

If the Christian himself does not say all of this, then the spiritual father must labor for a long time and ask many questions, going through the entire law of God, in order to draw out from the Christian everything that is absolutely necessary for confession and without which the spiritual father cannot give absolution.

In order to make a good confession and not impose an excessive burden upon the spiritual father, the Christian must prepare himself well before confession.

For such preparation there are three required things: he must examine his sins, he must have sorrow for those sins, and he must resolve to amend his life.

HOW TO EXAMINE ONE'S SINS

To examine one's sins is sometimes a difficult task, for it is not easy for a Christian to remember what happened a year ago since the last confession. But whether it is difficult or easy, it is absolutely necessary, because without an examination there can be no confession at all.

In order to examine his heart properly, the Christian should, above all, go through the entire law of God.

If the Christian is literate, this is very easy, for he can read the law of God from a book; better still, he may read some book which explains the law of God and describes the various sins that occur among people.

If the Christian is illiterate, this task is more difficult, but it is even more necessary for the illiterate than for one who can read, because it is harder for the illiterate to remember everything in his mind and to forget nothing.

To the illiterate I would give this advice: when they are preparing to go to confession, let them ask someone who knows how to read to read to them some devout little book in which confession is discussed.

Whether it be a relative or a stranger, anyone will gladly render such a service to a Christian, and each will rejoice that his instruction is of benefit to someone.

In this way, the illiterate could learn many good and beautiful things.

But if one does not wish to use this method, then—this is absolutely necessary—he must go through his entire life in his thoughts, beginning from the last good confession.

The first question which each person must ask himself is the one I now ask you: Were all the confessions of your life always good? Was there ever a confession in your life in which, out of shame or fear, you concealed some sin from the spiritual father?

Recall all the confessions of your life; search whether you will find among them a sacrilegious one. If you recall such a confession which you have not yet corrected, then know that you must correct it this year. How are you to correct it?

You must confess all the sins which you confessed in that confession, together with those which you concealed; and in addition you must say that you confessed falsely and received Communion sacrilegiously.

In this way you correct one bad confession. And if there were many such confessions, then you must say the same for each one.

If you, my brother, completely forgot about that bad confession at the next confession, and then sincerely confessed everything you remembered at that time, then that confession was good and forgave all sins—even those you did not remember. Nevertheless, you must still correct the first bad confession.

If after that bad confession there followed many confessions in which you continually forgot about the old bad confession, then now you need to correct only that first bad one.

But if after that bad confession you again, a second and third time, confessed badly, and your conscience reproached you, and you remembered that first bad confession and knew that it needed to be corrected, then you must now correct all those bad confessions.

First, you must determine how many such bad confessions there were. If you cannot calculate them exactly, then at least say something like this: "For example, I am now thirty or forty years old, and the bad confession which I must correct took place when I was about twenty years old." And if they occurred more frequently, then say it as it truly was.

From such an account of yours, the spiritual father himself will be able to determine how many sins you have arising from those invalid confessions. Such an account is sufficient for the spiritual father, even if he himself makes the calculation rather than you. But without such an account, the spiritual father can in no way absolve you of sin. After that, say what kind of sin it was which you were ashamed to confess; and at the end you must again repeat all those sins which you have already confessed. Do not say that you have already confessed them before, for such a confession is of no value before the Lord God.

Today I myself will help you examine all your sins.

Examine your life in your thoughts. If you had false confessions and must confess your whole life, then first recall your childhood years—that is one part of your life. Then recall your years as a young man or young woman—that is the second part. Then those years when you were in the army, or in service, or at work, or wherever it may have been. Then recall that part of your life which has passed since your marriage. Even that part you may divide into smaller sections—for example, how you lived with your first wife, and then how you conducted yourself and took a second—and thus divide your whole life.

But if you must confess only one year since your last confession, because all previous confessions were good, then examine your life differently. Look for sins that you committed at home, others in the tavern, others again in the village, and with your thoughts go even as far as the town or the marketplace. Thus, from all sides gather your sins together and keep them firmly in mind, so that they do not scatter before confession and so that in holy confession you know which sin to speak of first.

In this way the spiritual father will have no difficulty with you, and you yourself will find such a confession pleasing, and it will become easier and more joyful for your heart. And in order to seek out and examine all your sins, go through the law of God as well, and in each commandment look for the ways in which you have offended the Lord God. In this way you will make an examination of conscience.

SORROW FOR SINS

When you have already examined all your sins, then also consider the eternal punishment which is due to you for your sins—how great that punishment is.

You know that for a single sin which the angels committed only in thought, God punished them with eternal fire in hell. For a single grave sin, unexpiated, it is just according to divine justice

to be confined in that dreadful infernal prison where, for ages, the accursed devils suffer in terrible fire.

Such a punishment is due for one sin alone, and in that dreadful hell there is more than one sinner condemned for eternity for only one sin.

Now therefore consider what punishment is due to you. And when you set that punishment before your mind, you will begin to grieve over it, and your conscience will gnaw at you, realizing that for a foolish and worthless sin you have brought such divine punishment upon yourself.

Perhaps some of you, my dear brothers, have at one time seen with your own eyes—or at least heard from others—what a dreadful and sorrowful life is lived by those unfortunate people who are condemned in prison to punishment even unto death. A heavy, dark grief gnaws at them and crushes them. There is no longer any joy for them in this world, no consolation at all, except the one hope that the Most Gracious Sovereign might show mercy, remit the punishment, and restore their freedom. Those poor people grow pale from sorrow and torment. Food brings them no pleasure, the sunshine is no comfort to them, and even at night their sleep is restless. And if, in addition, one of them fears that he may be sentenced to death, then that

anxiety and torment choke the heart, oppress it, gnaw at it, and it seems to the Christian as though fire were burning within him.

So too will conscience gnaw at you, my dear brothers, and fire will burn in your hearts, when you truly understand what cruel punishment awaits you if you do not atone for your sins.

Oh, how dreadful and sorrowful is the fate of the man who has grievously offended God, drawn His terrible wrath upon himself, and earned for himself eternal punishment in hell.

Who would not weep over him with burning tears?

He has turned the grace and gifts of God into terrible misfortune. Instead of paradise, he has made his dwelling in hell through lack of self-restraint; he has earned death through a single moment of empty pleasure and has become a stranger to the glory of God and to eternal life.

When God comes in darkness and with thousands of angelic hosts to punish sinners and to save the righteous, who will endure His terror, who will appear before His face?

When the Judge sits upon His throne, and the angels stand before Him, and the trumpets sound, and flames burn—what will the poor soul of the sinner do when led to judgment?

All the sins of a man will stand before him and accuse him; and how will a man answer the Immortal King? With what boldness will the adulterer look upon the Judge? There nothing will help—when God Himself is Judge—neither possessions, nor friendships, nor fame, nor riches. Only one thing will matter there: good works.

When God comes upon the earth in glory, and when all creation trembles in fear before the face of God, and a river of fire flows before the tribunal, and the books of conscience are opened and hidden deeds are revealed—who will deliver the sinner from the unquenchable fire?

Dreadful is that judgment, and just is that judgment; and bitter and wretched is the life of the sinner.

When a sinner reflects upon the encounter with the dread coming of God for judgment, he cannot but fear the wrath of God and the terrible punishment that awaits him.

Therefore you too, my dear brothers—when you have found sin within your souls and have understood the punishment that is due to you—fear that punishment, repent with your whole heart, and weep over your sins, so that God may forgive your sins for the tears of your repentance and restore to you His grace.

Repent and weep over your sins because through them you have offended your most loving Father, your God—the God who created you out of love and who sustains you in life out of love. You have offended God who, for your salvation, sent His Only-begotten Son from heaven; you have offended that Son of God who loved you so greatly that He shed His Blood for you.

Through your sins you have lost, squandered, and trampled underfoot the grace which He purchased for you with His life; you have been ungrateful to Him, repaying boundless benefactions with evil.

You have abandoned your most loving Father—the source of every good—in order to serve your most cruel enemy; you have abandoned your friend and brother and surrendered yourselves into the hands of the one who desires for you nothing but misfortune and evil.

How then can you not weep? How can you not repent with your whole heart for your sins—not only out of fear of the punishment you have deserved, but also out of love for that God who deserves all love, because He Himself loved you first and is infinitely good in Himself?

THE RESOLUTION TO AMEND ONE'S LIFE

Whoever among you has rightly understood what I have written already sees clearly how a Christian must flee from sin whenever sin approaches him. The resolution to amend one's life consists precisely in this: to flee from sin and to guard oneself against it. Whoever guards himself against sin does not sin; and whoever has ceased to sin has amended his life.

He who has truly recognized what sin is cannot fail to flee from it—just as one flees from the bite of a rabid dog, or from disease, death, or any great misfortune. Sin is a greater evil than all these together. At every confession the Christian must bring a heart turned away from sin. In confession he must sincerely desire to amend himself of all his sins.

A confession without such a resolution of amendment is entirely invalid. Confession benefits a Christian only insofar as he truly has the will to amend his life. Therefore, my dear brothers, even before confession you must reflect within yourselves what kind of life you intend to begin after confession. You must say to yourselves in your hearts that you will never again return to those sins by which you offended God, but will completely turn away from them.

CONFESSION

When a Christian has thus prepared himself, he may approach this holy Mystery of Christ, in which the priest, standing in the place of God, grants forgiveness of sins to the faithful who confess. In this holy Mystery the Christian brings contrition, the resolution to amend his life, and the accusation of himself for all the sins which he has examined in his heart; and in return he receives from the Lord God forgiveness of all remitted sins and new divine grace.

In this way the holy covenant between man and God is renewed, in which God accepts man as His child, and man accepts God as his Father.

The Christian must take great care to bring to confession everything that is required for this holy Mystery of Repentance. For if he fails to bring something that is required, then there is no Mystery, and there is no forgiveness of sins.

Just as holy Baptism requires water, and Chrismation requires holy chrism, so confession requires what the Christian himself brings: contrition, resolution, and confession of sins.

Just as no priest, nor even a bishop, can perform the Mystery of Baptism without water—because water is the essential matter of

Baptism—so likewise no priest in the world can forgive sins without the matter of Repentance, which the Christian himself must bring to confession.

You see the difference between Baptism and the Mystery of Repentance. In Baptism, the spiritual fathers themselves provide the water needed for baptizing the child, and neither godparents nor relatives need concern themselves about it. But in the holy Mystery of Repentance, the Christian who wishes to rid himself of sin must himself take care to bring that water by which his soul is to be cleansed.

If he does not bring this water himself, then no priest will be able to wash his soul. And what is this water required for the Mystery of Repentance? That water is: sorrow for sins, the resolution to amend one's life, and sincere self-accusation before the confessor.

Therefore, pay very close attention, my dear brothers, never to approach confession without these three things, without that holy water which you must have in your heart at confession and must bring in your soul to confession. You already know about contrition and the resolution to amend your life; therefore, concerning confession itself, remember well this great saying which I now tell you:

AS YOU SINNED, MY DEAR BROTHER, SO MUST YOU CONFESS.

Open your whole heart before the spiritual father. Let there not remain in your heart a single sin which you would be ashamed to reveal to the spiritual father.

Indeed, if in confession you leave out something small or insignificant, while confessing all the serious sins, then through such an omission or forgetfulness your confession will not yet be bad, and your sins will be forgiven. But if—God forbid, my brother—you were to omit the confession of some grave and serious sin out of shame or fear, then know well that through such an unjust and insincere confession you turn the most holy grace of Jesus Christ into your own condemnation. Such a confession is sacrilegious and is the worst and most dreadful sin you can commit.

Through such a confession the Christian turns the holy remedy, purchased by the death of Christ, into his own eternal destruction.

It would be better not to confess at all than to offend God by such a grave sacrilegious sin.

THE ABSOLUTION OF THE PRIEST

All that the Christian himself brings to confession is still not sufficient by itself, nor does it of itself forgive sins.

Just as in Baptism water alone is not sufficient, but it is necessary that the spiritual father pour it upon the child's head and pronounce the holy words: *"The servant of God is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"*—so also that which the faithful bring to confession is not sufficient unless there is added, as it were, a holy seal: the absolution of the priest.

In Baptism, by holy words, the priest makes from water the holy Mystery of Baptism; in holy confession, by the sacred words of absolution, the priest makes from the repentance which the sinner brings to confession the holy Mystery of Penance, by which sins are washed away.

The words by which the priest accomplishes the Mystery of Penance are these:

> ***May our Lord and God Jesus Christ, through the grace and mercies of His love for mankind, forgive you all your sins; and I, the unworthy priest, by the authority given to me by Him, forgive and absolve you from every bond, including that of oath (if the one confessing is a-priest, "of restraint"), and prohibition, insofar as I am able and as you have need; moreover, I absolve you from all your sins, in the name of the Father † and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit †. Amen. Go in peace and sin no more.***

If the priest were to omit any of these words, there would be no confession, even if the sinner were to weep bitterly.

For by these words the priest forgives the sinner's sins in the name of the Lord God. This authority Jesus Christ Himself gave to His apostles, and through them to the priests, when He said:

"Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you retain, they are retained."
(John 20:23)

"Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
(Matthew 16:19)

That is, in our language:
Those to whom you forgive sins, they shall be forgiven; and those whose sins you retain, they shall be retained. What you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you loose and absolve on earth shall be loosed and absolved in heaven.

This authority the priest exercises in confession: he loosens from sins, which bound the soul as with chains, and he binds with the penance which he imposes upon the sinner.

PENANCE

When a Christian has thus brought to confession everything that he was obliged to bring, and in confession has received from the Lord God the forgiveness of sins, he has once again become a child of God and has regained God's grace. There remains for him only one thing: to perform the penance which the spiritual father imposed in confession.

This penance may take many forms—at times great, at times small.

For lesser sins, spiritual fathers impose a lighter penance; for grave sins, they impose a heavier penance. Yet no matter how great the penance may be, it is always very small in comparison with the punishment which a Christian has deserved through grave sins.

This is a most blessed exchange in this matter: the Christian is freed from eternal punishment and, of his own good will, takes upon himself the penance imposed by the spiritual father. Through confession he exchanges the eternal punishment of hell for a short and light penance.

Whoever understands this well accepts penance very willingly and takes care not to neglect it.

To omit out of negligence the penance imposed by the spiritual father for grave sins is itself a grave sin. This grave sin does not make the confession invalid, but it takes away the grace which confession bestowed.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE AFTER CONFESSION?

Even more important than performing penance is to amend one's life after confession.

When the spiritual father asks the Christian in confession whether he desires to amend his life and turn away from his sins, the Christian answers: *"I desire to do so."*
This word is short and seems small, yet it is so great and so important before the Saints, the Angels, and the very Throne of God that a Christian can speak no greater word in his life.

All the Angels and all the Saints in heaven hear this word and place it before the Throne of God in order to obtain God's grace for the sinner. This word passes beyond all the clouds, passes through the whole of heaven, and reaches even to that height where the Lord God, upon His throne, receives eternal glory from His Angels and Saints.

Therefore remember, my dear brothers, that this word *"I will amend my life,"* which you spoke in your heart before confession and aloud before the spiritual father in confession, must be fulfilled in your life.

After confession you must so change your life that you never return to your former sins.

You who approached confession as drunkards must return home from confession as sober men. Even if some among you did not swear off strong drink entirely, nevertheless, if he wishes to be a Christian, he must be a sober man.

You who have confessed sins of impurity must amend yourselves in regard to those sins and become chaste and devout. You who have committed injustice against others must make restitution for the wrong and guard yourselves against it in the future. You who, before confession, cursed and uttered maledictions must now strive to rid yourselves of that evil habit.

You who came to confession with malice and hatred in your hearts must now be reconciled and make peace with those against whom you bore anger.

In order to strengthen you in this new life which, by the grace of God, you begin after holy confession, I shall recount for you the example of the prodigal son, which Jesus Christ relates in the Holy Gospel.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

A certain landowner had two sons.
The elder was good and industrious; the younger was reckless.
That younger son desired to leave his father's house and seek happiness in a foreign land.

He went to his father and said:
"Father, give me the portion of the estate that belongs to me; I wish to go out into the world."
The father did as the son wished, though it grieved him deeply that his son was leaving.

The reckless youth went out into the world and fell into bad company. He began to drink, to revel, and to gamble with his companions, and in a short time he squandered all the property his father had given him. When the money was gone, the friends were gone as well.

The young man then had to enter service. He found employment with a cruel master, who gave him no food and sent him to pasture swine. As the poor man was perishing from hunger and envied even the food of the swine, a thought came to his heart:

"In my father's house even the lowest servant has bread to eat, and here I am dying of hunger. I will leave this wicked service and return to my father. I will fall on my knees before him and say:
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Take me as a hired servant.'"

As he resolved in his heart, so he did. From that distant foreign land he returned to his father's home.

The father, who from the very moment his son had departed never ceased to mourn him and to watch for his return, recognized his son from afar in his torn garments. He ran out to meet him, embraced him, held him fast, and kissed him.

The son did exactly as he had resolved. He fell on his knees, kissed his father's feet, and said:
"I have sinned; receive me, though unworthy, at least as a laborer in your house."

Before the son had finished speaking, the father raised him from the ground and pressed him to his heart. He turned to his servants and said:
"Quickly bring the finest bright garment, a golden ring, and new shoes. Prepare a great feast. Rejoice and celebrate with me, for this my son who was lost has been found; he was as though dead, and now he has returned to life."

Oh, how many of you, my dear brothers, have acted like that prodigal son when, through sin, you departed from God and squandered all the good gifts of the soul with which God had endowed you. Through sin you lost the grace of God, the reward of good works, and the right to the Kingdom of Heaven. You gave yourselves over to the service of the cruel master—sin and the accursed devil.

Let such sinners now be like the prodigal son also in repentance. Let them reflect in their hearts how bitter and dreadful it is to depart from God and to incur His displeasure. And once they understand this, let them say in their hearts, as the prodigal son did:
"I will return to God, my heavenly Father."

The moment the sinner speaks this word in his heart, the Lord God Himself—like that merciful father who awaited his son—comes out to meet him with His grace.

That is the grace of God which calls you to repentance within your heart. It is the grace of God which, together with the Word of God that I send you in this letter, awakens sorrow for sin and inspires the resolve to make a good confession and to amend one's life.

At that time, when you were still lying in the mire and filth of your sins, God, by His grace, Himself came to you first, in order to draw you out of that mire and restore you to Christian life.

And when you followed that grace, and—like the prodigal son—fell at the feet of your heavenly Father and confessed your sins, God embraces your soul with His grace and presses it to His heart as a child.

The more sincerely and with the greater sorrow one confesses, the more God raises him up and draws him to Himself.

Just as the merciful father turned to his servants and told them to rejoice, so too the Lord God rejoices in heaven over the repentant sinner and shares His joy with the Angels and the Saints.

As that father clothed his son in a new garment and gave him a golden ring, so God clothes the soul of the sinner in His holy grace and places upon his finger the golden ring of divine love.

The grace of God is like that white, radiant garment.
The grace of God adorns the soul and makes it pleasing and beautiful before God and all heaven.

The love of God is like the golden ring.
Love binds the human soul to the Lord God, just as in holy marriage love is meant to bind a man to his wife.

When, through sin, the bond of love between God and humanity was torn apart, the human person no longer possessed that golden ring. But when, through confession, he returns to the Lord God, God restores to him that golden ring of love.

Whoever among you was, in his sins, like the prodigal son, let him also be like him in repentance. And God will receive him just as that merciful father received the prodigal son.

And just as the prodigal son, once received with such love into his father's house, never again leaves his own home nor enters foreign service, so you as well—who through repentance have returned to God—do not return to your sins.

Consider how that prodigal son, once his father had received him so mercifully, took care never again to offend his father and never again to abandon him. What do you think—if that same wicked master, who had made him tend the swine, had come to him and invited him back into his former service, would he have gone with him? If he had promised him the same pleasures he had once experienced in that service, what answer would that son have given him? Surely, he would not even have wished to listen to him.

And if that man had gone so far as to tell him to cast into the mire the bright garment he had received from his father, to sell or pawn the ring, and to put on once more those old, torn rags in order to tend the swine again—would not that son have grown indignant at such a command from that cruel master, who pretends to be a friend but is in fact the worst of enemies?

So too must you act when, after holy confession, temptation comes to you and seeks to draw you back into the very sin from which you have just confessed. For temptation will surely return.

To the one who in confession has been freed from drunkenness, that evil spirit which draws people to drunkenness will return, and by every means will entice, persuade, and beg him to return

to that same miserable slavery of drunkenness in which he once lay.

And so it is with everyone: the same sin that once held the sinner in bondage—like a cruel master holding a poor servant—will return and will pull and invite him back into that same foul and sinful way of life in which the Christian lay as though in filth and mire.

Such temptation, God knows, will promise everything in order only to draw him back into that misery.

It will appear to him that in drunkenness, impurity, or theft lies his true happiness. The person is ready to forget the punishment of God that is bound up with that sin.

Just as that cruel master told the prodigal son to throw his white garment into the mud, so too temptation to sin will demand of the Christian that he cast the bright garment of God's grace into the mire and trample it underfoot, and that he cast away and sell the golden ring of divine love.

When temptation to sin comes to you, my beloved brothers, remember that you cannot return to sin except by trampling underfoot the grace of God, trampling the Cross of Jesus Christ,

and casting away from yourselves the love of the Lord God. In every grave sin, all of this is contained.

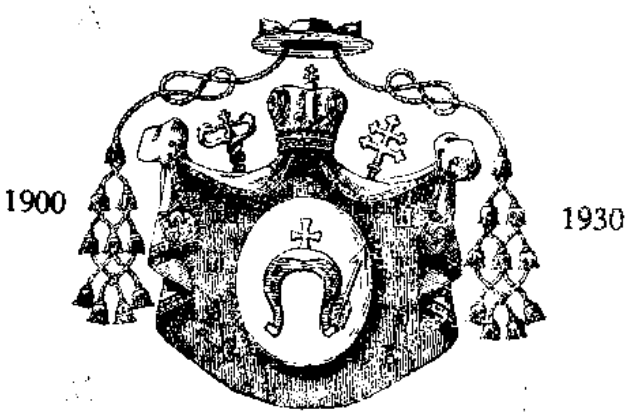
When a person commits a mortal sin, he casts the grace of God out of his heart and despises the sign of the holy Cross and the traces of the Blood of Christ, which are as it were a sacred seal impressed upon the soul.

May Almighty God guard you, my beloved brothers, from such misfortune. May He lead you peacefully in the grace of God along the path of Christian life, and may He grant you, year after year, that greatest grace which He can bestow: that you may always confess well, and after confession never again return to sin.

Just as after a harsh winter there comes a beautiful spring, and the warm sun and gentle spring rain draw forth from the earth every plant and flower; just as after the arduous struggle of the great and holy Fast there comes the bright and joyful feast of the holy Resurrection—so may the grace of God work within your souls, that after the bitter frost of sin there may come the joyful springtime of a truly Christian new life, and after the painful and demanding repentance of holy Paschal confession, there may follow the joy of resurrection.

In this joy of Christ's Resurrection every righteous Christian rejoices who serves God with a sincere heart; and in the immeasurable joy of heaven every Christian shall rejoice who, having done penance for his sins and having lived in the grace of God, departs from this world.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



Written in Lviv, on the third Saturday of the Great Forty-Day Fast,
16 February (3 March) 1901.

† Andrey
Metropolitan